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Testimony in Support of HB 5441

**An Act Authorizing Certain Emergency Response Employees to Enroll
in the Municipal Employees Retirement System**

Labor and Public Employees Committee

February 19, 2013

Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, Senator Markley, Representative Smith and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5441, a proposed amendment to section 7-425 of the general statutes pertaining to employee eligibility to enroll in the municipal employees retirement system (MERS).

The State of Connecticut has sought to improve efficiencies -- and save money -- through greater regionalization, where appropriate. The Town of Westport, which I represent, seeks to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness through the creation of a "Regional Emergency Response Center" (RETC), serving at least three communities. Negotiations have already taken place with the neighboring towns of Wilton and New Canaan, which are eager to participate.

However, the new regional emergency telecommunications center hasn't been created because of an unintended obstacle. As section 7-425 of the statutes is currently written, only *the* "Public Safety Answering Point" (PSAP) responsible for the receipt and processing of 9-1-1 calls, meaning that the dispatch entity must be the *first point* of reception. In Westport's case, it's the Police Department which is the primary contact point for 9-1-1 calls, not the Fire/EMS Department, which would handle the PSAP responsibilities. As the statute would be interpreted, the new dispatch entity would be considered an "Equipped Secondary Answering Point," and its employees would be ineligible for MERS enrollment.

Why can't Westport's Police Department create such a dispatch entity? It could, but the other municipalities interested in participating in the regional center also plan to involve their Fire departments, so it would be much more straightforward to create the entity under that department's auspices. The other interested towns have the same issue as Westport does: their Police Departments are the primary answering points, but the Fire Departments are the dispatch points.

HB5441 affords municipalities entered into such a dispatch capability the option to participate in the MERS program, so it is enabling legislation rather than a mandate. Municipalities which decide to participate would be liable for a portion of enrolled employees' share of the contribution to MERS. Thus, there is *no fiscal impact to the State*. At last check, there are eight RETCs across the state, with roughly 120 employees enrolled in MERS.

Changing just a few words in the statute, specifically to establish "any entity authorized by the Department of Public Safety as a public answering point responsible for the receipt and processing of 9-1-1 call for at least three municipalities" will do the trick.

I respectfully entreat the Committee to consider such a minor change, in the interests of achieving the sort of efficient regionalization which Connecticut has long espoused. Thank you.